

## Beyond the Trans-Atlantic Matrix: Tagore and Latin America

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I have found my twin interests – in Latin America and in the reception of the Indian poet Tagore in the Hispanic world – to be of direct relevance to the theme of South-South cultural dialogue. Working in both areas for a considerable time has led me to conclude that a renewed exploration of Tagorean dynamics could provide another area of (ontological) affinity, from a humanistic standpoint, with the stream of Latin American writings which are traditionally viewed through the prism of a trans-Atlantic connection. Although the latter is not the theme of this paper, which elaborates mainly on the nature of Tagore's reception in Spain and Latin America, I propose to highlight certain theoretical and empirical indicators in that direction, creating an enabling environment for culturally, philosophically and conceptually interconnected readings.

It is by now well known that interest in Tagore in Spain has shown much more resilience than in other countries of Europe, including England. In fact his continuous Spanish reception has clearly been in sharp contrast to his ebbing presence in the rest of the West since the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> This remarkable circumstance is due to various factors, such as the literary figures involved in the translations into Spanish, the conflictual dynamics of an epistemological nature which these provoked, and the autobiographical imperatives of some of the outstanding receptors as well as of their societies – not to forget of course the pull of the commercial potential of a rarity from the East! At least this was a discernible pattern until the 1980s. It can also be claimed with a fair degree of credibility that although in other domains there were literary figures or translators of eminence such as André Gide, Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova or Helene Meyer-Franck, in nowhere but Spain was such sustained attention paid to his translation

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<sup>1</sup> It is significant to observe that two well-known contemporary Tagore scholars and translators from Europe, Martin Kämpchen and William Radice, talk about the revival of interest in Tagore in some parts of Europe. Kämpchen even affirms that the time for the Indian poet has now come in Germany (Kämpchen 2003).

by a poet couple, Juan Ramón Jiménez and his wife Zenobia Camprubí Aymar, of the highest merit. The undiminishing popularity of their work over decades is a testimony to the quality of the Spanish translation itself. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that although Tagore translations have proliferated in general, genuine interest in his entire spectrum of work and the deserved attention to his true significance have remained unrealized.

However, with the euphoria surrounding the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tagore's birth in 2011/2012, like many others involved with his *œuvre*, I have been trying to mull over the question of our engagement with him and his relevance today. Certainly, in a giant like Tagore, who was equally a poet, writer, painter and thinker, there are many facets yet to be discovered, stemming also from the need to identify the sources of his tremendous creativity, which have thus far remained obscured by the often misused label that he was merely a great mystic poet in the Hindu tradition. There has been no dearth of hard-hitting Greens and Chestertons as well as sympathetic admirers such as Akhmatova who shared this idea. Much that is unknown remains further clouded by the ideas of Occidental Orientalism. Although such perceptions have also been evidence in the Hispanic context, as we shall see later, it is the recognition of the all-pervasive creative urge and its ultimate relation to the universal human truth as sought and expressed by Tagore that has prevailed over all other interpretations. From the perspective of my interest in Latin American literature and culture I am more inclined to believe that it is this dimension that has ensured Tagore's relevance in the Hispanic trajectory on both sides of the Atlantic, beyond the boundaries of the defined contours of the transatlantic transactions. In this respect, a related question would be whether the elements of the known and unknown Tagore constitute a third interconnecting space in this historically determined two-way transatlantic dialogue, one that responds adequately to the Latin American (literary) aspiration for a more universal and plural engagement in general and the theoretical awareness of some of our contemporary critical societal issues.

It is widely held that Tagore's reception along the European shores of the Atlantic – that is, in Spain – became the source of the overall Hispanic reception. Nonetheless, in spite of the incredibly creative and lasting translations by the Spanish translators Zenobia Camprubí Aymar and

Juán Ramón Jiménez,<sup>2</sup> which so deeply touched so many readers across the continents, the Latin American responses had their own very independent origins, as we shall see later. Within Spain itself the story of this reception is full of conflicting reactions, primarily pitting the claims for the need to access an alternative (oriental) poetic vision as revealed by Tagore against those vying for epistemological insularity. Juan Ramón was accused of having gone to sleep on a “pillow of feathers” (Eugenio d’Ors)<sup>3</sup> inflated by a representative of a passive philosophy of “beatified nirvana” (Emilia Pardo Bazán),<sup>4</sup> whose mysticism was nothing more than purely subjective emotions regarded as divine with no foundations in reason or reality. It is a different matter that the creative endeavour of the Jiménez couple and this new kind of poetry caught the popular imagination for which the ground had already been prepared through Spain’s own historical developments. Even before the 1898 generation’s self-critical appraisal, forces were at work encouraging Spain to look outside of itself, though within the European domain. One could say that after the Nobel Award in 1913, Tagore quite unexpectedly entered into the realm and introduced a fresh oriental wind. To that extent it must be admitted that Spain found itself entertaining a dialogue with a non-Atlantic space, a dialogue which had been purged after the Islamic experience and in spite of the vigilant guards, or ‘carabineros’ as Ortega would call them.<sup>5</sup>

The groundwork for this opening was prepared by a historical reality of Spain within a particular period that needs to be emphasized in order to understand the Tagorean reception. In Spanish literature the period 1900–1936 has been characterized as ‘silver’. It represented a new thrust in literary, artistic and scientific development. After the loss of the last vestiges of the Spanish empire in the Americas in 1898 there was a resurgence of self-evaluation and critical enquiry. While the national culture did promote the growth of regional cultures, the reception of a more reformist-

2 The whole collection of translated texts was later published with the title *Rabindranath Tagore: Obra escogida. Lírica breve. Teatro. Cuento. Aforismo. Escuela*. Aguilar: Madrid 1955. It also contained three epistolary texts addressed to Zenobia Camprubí by Ortega y Gasset published in the newspaper *El Sol* in 1918. See also Young (1995), who describes details of the translating process based on Jiménez archival documents.

3 This expression adducing excessive sentimentalism in Tagore’s poetry appears in the form of a newspaper or magazine note (1921[?]) maintained in the Zenobia Camprubí–Juan Ramón Jiménez Hall Archives in Puerto Rico.

4 “Un poco de crítica. La obra de Tagore”, *ABC* (Madrid) 4 de mayo de 1921.

5 See text of Ortega y Gasset mentioned in note 2.

liberal approach through special ‘institutionalist’ attention from the central powers began to take shape. One of the major influences on the first nucleus of writers from 20<sup>th</sup> century was Karl Christian Friedrich Krause, the German philosopher (1781-1832), whose ideas led them to an attempt to identify the Spanish national mentality. The Krausist philosophy of rationalism and new humanism and the *Institución libre de enseñanza*, established earlier to promote a reformist spirit in all spheres, opened the floodgates of movements, philosophies, ideologies, and cultural tendencies from foreign lands. That is not to deny the parallel attempts to analyse and comprehend the intrinsic characteristics of the *ser español*, meant to be an expression of critical and constructive patriotism. The rationalist philosophy of Krause was part of the foundation of philosophers like Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno. The institutionalist spirit laid great stress on love for education and combined it with a cult of the child, who, according to Unamuno, was “one of the most neglected but at the same time the most necessary amongst us”.<sup>6</sup> The fact that “veneration of the child means respect for the future” became an accepted slogan may explain why Tagore’s evocation of the child carried so much appeal among Spaniards. The institutionalist spirit also led to the establishment of other institutions with an emphasis on the free expression of thoughts and exchange of ideas, as well as the goal of bringing together the leading minds of the day. The *Residencia de Estudiantes* and the *Residencia de Señoritas* were two such institutes. It was in such melting pots that scholars, writers and students of all types met and that Tagore was discussed with abundant enthusiasm once Zenobia Camprubí had brought the English translation to the attention of Juan Ramón, the leading figure of the *Residencia de Estudiantes*. It was also here that Gregorio Marañón and Ortega y Gasset – who had analyzed the world of Tagore’s Amal, the child protagonist in the play *The Post Office*, and other translated poems from *The Crescent Moon* and *Gitanjali* – not only pushed the Spanish creative minds towards the oriental poet but also, years later, became the source of his transatlantic dialogue in Latin America. I consider the response by Ortega y Gasset so fundamental that a further explanation would be in order. The celebration of childhood in Tagore had, for Ortega, a universal eternal dimension, which fitted very well with his own thoughts of universalism. His analysis of what Amal ac-

6 “El culto al niño es uno de los más descuidados entre nosotros y de los más necesarios.” (Unamuno 1958 [1906]: 686).

tually represents in a philosophical sense, the aspiring child present in each and every individual, opened to the Spaniards the deep perception of an eastern “David” who could knock open the door of all sensibilities in spite of all “vigilant guards” against outside ideas (Ortega y Gasset 1981 [1918]: 17-20). In the purely literary sphere, not merely the translations but also the lyrical prologues of Juan Ramón accompanying them provide ample proof of the great Spanish poet’s desire to understand Tagore. In fact, these areas remain regrettably unexplored in comprehending the poetic world of Juan Ramón himself and the place of Tagore in that world. Besides the affinity between the Andalusian sensibility of Jiménez and Tagore’s Bengali, it was his pervasive presence in “everything” for them that led Zenobia Camprubí to declare Tagore as their “spiritual companion” in one of her long letters to Tagore in 1919.<sup>7</sup>

Due to the limited scope of this article I cannot delve into the analysis of the “*colofones líricos*”<sup>8</sup> nor the five poems dedicated to Tagore by Juan Ramón much later,<sup>9</sup> in order to show the place the Bengali poet occupied for Jiménez and the nature of his reception. Certainly this whole corpus of positive reception overshadowed the opposite reactions which, in my view, created a dynamic tension contributing to the survival of Tagore, due to the dialectic tensions determining the continuity of any phenomenon. Nor is this article focused on deciphering his impact on individuals, although by way of the astoundingly clear evidence in this case we may quote the following, in my edited version, from one of the well-known critics and biographers of Juan Ramón, Francisco Garfias:

The moment of Tagore’s appearance in Spain was crucial to Spanish poetry. The great Rubén was dead and the neck of the modernist swan had been twisted, although it continued to produce agonizing songs from second-rate poets, stiff as they were with their accent on the anti-penultimate syllables and weary of pagan deities. Spain was looking for a more intimate and natural poetry, detached from a cold plaster or artificial marble [...] After slanderous spirits, princesses and Bacchantes, Tagore erupted with his sun, his cloud, his

7 All her letters are in the archives of the Visva Bharati University Library at Santiniketan, India.

8 See Ganguly 1992. These “*colofones líricos*” are poetic prefatory pieces written by the Spanish poet to introduce some of Tagore’s works in Spanish translation, such as *The Crescent Moon*, *Fruit Gathering*, *The Gardener*, *Gitanjali*, plays such as *Malini*, *The Post Office*, etc.

9 Included in Zenobia Camprubí–Juan Ramón Jiménez Hall Archives (see note 3); *Luz de la atención* was published posthumously by *Observatorio* (Madrid) 1986.

half-open flower, his sleeping child and his crescent moon [...]. The poetic material used by Tagore carried the promise of communicating to the ears a poetry full of fragrance of the sunny fields, of sudden springs, of peace of solitude and a dialogue with God, a poetry that was called upon to shake and freshen up a little the plaster-ridden dry Spanish poetry of that period. From the Bengali poet, through Juan Ramón, many of the poets of succeeding generations drank an exquisite juice, and in the author of *The Gardner* the Chilean Pablo Neruda learnt [...] his first blind and suggestive enumeration of plants and animals which were later to impress his readers so much. (Garfias 1961)<sup>10</sup>

The above reference to Neruda projects the Spanish reception to the other side of the Atlantic, enabling us to explore some aspects of the Latin-American response. From this it will be possible to evaluate the relevance of Tagore in the literary and cultural context of that area today.

If the feminine figure responsible for the first Spanish responses was Zenobia Camprubí, popular perception credits the emerging Argentine woman of letters, Victoria Ocampo, as the first Latin-American to have responded, even if personally, to the earliest encounters with the *Gitanjali* poems.<sup>11</sup> But apart from the engaging story of the relationship between Tagore and Ocampo, which is treated at length in another accompanying article in this volume, it needs to be highlighted that the first-ever reader's response in print came from another Argentinian intellectual, Joaquín V. González, who translated neither *Gitanjali* nor *The Crescent Moon* but *One Hundred Poems of Kabir* in 1914, which was itself a collection of the Indian medieval mystic poet Kabir's verses translated into English by Tagore. González was driven by the need to understand the nuances of love for the other, as explored in the Indian medieval devotional movement known as "Bhakti", and its application as a cultural precept for Argentina at that time. The 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century Indian saint and poet Kabir came from very humble origins and rose to spread a message of harmony and spiritual transcendence. His simple poetic double verse compositions (called *Dohas*) were derived from the ordinary lives of ordinary local people but carried very powerful universal appeal that showed a way to rise above all kinds of sectarianism. González's translation was inspired by a personal commitment to studying and propagating the message of harmony implied in the concept of love and brotherhood extolled in those compositions,

<sup>10</sup> Translations of this and subsequent quotations originally in Spanish, are mine.

<sup>11</sup> For more on this encounter see the pioneering study by Dyson 1988 (several reprints).

and to demonstrate its relevance to the conflicts arising from the clash of interests – political, economic and cultural – in Argentinian society at that time, in spite of economic prosperity. This First World War period ushered in a sense of disenchantment with “civilized” Europe and utilitarianism for many intellectuals in Latin America and prompted a search for new alternatives and ways of thinking, in line with the earlier or existing perceptions of self-identitarian thinkers of the region. Was González trying to unearth a deeper message from this book from the East (or the *other* South) to resolve the hate-ridden antagonism resulting from the existing binary of a ‘visible’ and an ‘invisible’ Argentina?

The relevance of Kabir’s (and consequently of Tagore’s) worldview, expressed in simple but strong and effective verses, inspired González, one of Argentina’s finest men of letters and a significant cultural figure, not only to publish Kabir but also to reflect on the importance of the humanist tradition revived by Tagore through his translation. Having read in Tagore’s *Sadhana* (1916) that love is the perfection of conscience, Joaquín González felt the pleasure of discovering how Tagore transfuses the soul of Kabir in his translation. As he says in his preface to the book:

[...] Undoubtedly this philosophy that in love all contradictions of existence become fused and lost [...] signifies that] only in love does one find invariable unity and duality. Love is one and both these things at the same time. Love is action and rest at the same time. Our heart constantly shifts position until it finds love and only then does it rest [...]. [T]his philosophy is rigorously scientific. It perceives love as the only indivisible essence which takes forms without changing its original virtue. This is the reality that transcends the Indian poems in which it is not always possible to draw a dividing line between what the mind could imagine as divine, pure and abstract love and the mystic love in which the former becomes impregnated with humanity and nature, as if surging from it, spiritualizing itself towards the divine or the infinite, thus returning to its primitive source. And human love may be said to be consecrated by the supreme ray of the only eternal love spread over all things of the world. Only one love impregnates the whole universe [...]; blind are those who hope to see it with the light of reason, of that reason which is the cause of separation. (González 1918: 47-48)

While such a universal message appeals to the great minds who help in its propagation, poets like Neruda, Gabriela Mistral, Dulce María Loynaz and so many others find in a truly contemporary man like Tagore the finest representative of a culture which, in Mistral’s words, had the ability to completely “transform knowledge into spiritual experience” (Mistral 2009

[1927]: 91). Mistral is deeply influenced by the fact that Tagore is that rare poet who wields the knowledge of all sciences and yet – here Mistral refers to the poet Maragall – “sings like a shepherd” (Mistral 2009 [1927]: 91). On the one hand, they see in his creations no desire to inculcate that modernity which privileges the present over the past. On the other hand, Tagore is a poet of spontaneous inspiration who transcends all demands of the artificiality of reason and technique. In Mistral’s view,

[...] in the West the notion of culture operates in a somehow crude manner where the *instrument* is too heavily felt. The *fabrication*, as seen by Abbé Bremond, is so visible that the reader of, for example, a poem, even though not an expert, clearly sees the *manipulation* and tastes it and even feels the weight of a dictionary. The poet appears to be a lamppost fitted with cables and lights. In the eyes of the reader he is like a chemist with his small potions of salts and alcohols. But the chemists of literature smile at being told about this deceit. Because they are firm in their belief that everything is chemistry. Nature, as well as the fruit derived without strong blows from sagacious pruning, is just *another* chemistry. Certainly so. Perhaps Tagore also works laboriously to create lines like Valéry does but one is immediately transported to the sense of an elevating faculty. (Mistral 2009 [1927]: 91)

She calls this sensation “gracia” which “gives the illusion of not being conditioned by reasoned will but by a happy consent” (Mistral 2009 [1927]: 91). In other words, Tagore is an inspired poet, which is the test for all great poets in Mistral’s view. When she had a personal encounter with him during his visit to the U.S. she saw the “burning fire” of inspiration in his eyes and a creative irony in his appearance (quoted in Argüello Scriba 2011: 132), which the images portraying him as mystic in his misleading robes failed to capture. This grace in poetry that Mistral talked about was responsible for Neruda’s fascination too, a perspective which still has not been analyzed. He appropriated Tagore in his first great adventure in verse on the theme of love. Whatever the critics may hold against him regarding plagiarism,<sup>12</sup> I have always looked at Neruda’s paraphrasing of a very significant Tagore poem, with deep symbolism and felicity in expression, as Neruda’s soul speaking on the theme of love, where the particularities are reconciled into a universal which identifies both poets as belonging to

<sup>12</sup> This famous incident was revealed by Vicente Huidobro in his journal *Vital. Revista de Higiene social* (January 1935) under the title “The Neruda-Tagore Affair”. Huidobro accused Neruda of having plagiarized one of Tagore’s poems. See the comprehensive reflections by Jason Wilson (2008: 72-74).



the same domain of thought. It has often been overlooked that Neruda inherited an inner fascination for the Tagorean ethos from his schoolteacher, who happened to be Gabriela Mistral. Many critics have dismissed this coincidence of poems as a simple inclination to imitate a foreign poet, but in my opinion the staunchness of the criticism against Neruda as a plagiarist was only an expression of the unwillingness of poets like Huidobro and his friends to accept Tagore's influence in opposition to the kind of avant-garde modernity they were trying to introduce in Chilean and Latin-American poetry.

The rupture in Chilean poetry of the post-1980s generation is built on an anti-modern project which was deeply distrustful of the rational social order and keen on a reading of the nostalgic, as critic and poet Naín Nómez tells us (Nómez 2012). The voice against the artificial simulacrum of a fragmented postmodern society, that started with Ángel Parra and Raúl Zurita, is a measure of the significance of the Mistral-Neruda tradition of Tagorean humanism. The literary achievement of timeless significance, true to experience and to human nature and where form and content are integrally and organically connected, enables universals (truths) to be shared in this humanist perspective across cultures.<sup>13</sup>

Needless to say, many of the original Tagorean texts in translation were published in different parts of Latin America from the 1920s on, together with articles on Tagore in leading Latin-American papers, journals and literary supplements. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a historical juncture which prompted many changes in thought and literary-cultural patterns in response to the terrible disappointment with western models on the economic, social and cultural fronts. As already noted, the First World War had accentuated the crisis and, among other manifestations, the Mexican Revolution became a symbol of the necessary changes. A new era began in terms of literary expression, when the search for identity became primordial. While on the one hand this gave rise to a series of autochthonous movements in literature that finally led to the glorified epoch of the *boom*, many writers, social activists and educators found in Tagore's approach to creative freedom and the spiritual quest an alternative worth emulating. These issues were covered frequently by *La Nación* in Argenti-

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<sup>13</sup> But how the 'unique' self of the humanist tradition coheres in this framework, and whether Tagorean thought conceptualizes that 'self' in any post-humanist fashion might be a fruitful area to explore. In this article we have only raised the question.

na.<sup>14</sup> From Costa Rica, the journal *Repertorio Americano* (as described in the extensive article by Argüello Scriba 2011) carried abundant reflection on and reproductions of Tagore's creations. Particularly his educational ideas for children were repeatedly reflected in the campaigns of pioneers such as García Monge, Omar Dengo, Brenes Mesén and others, and are promoted even today by Hilda Chen Apuy (Argüello Scriba 2011: 127 and 138). In Brazil the poet and writer Tasso da Silveira and his group created a new mouthpiece for opening cultural frontiers with the establishment of a journal called *Terra de Sol: Revista de arte e pensamento* (1924-1925), with a comprehensive Ibero-American agenda but which also encouraged reference to intellectual movements from other areas. José Vasconcelos, on the other hand, had already been steeped in Indian thought for quite some time, and created a vast readership and following for Tagore in his educational campaigns undertaken in post-revolutionary Mexico.<sup>15</sup>

From Cecília Meireles we learn how, during the 1920s, anything pertaining to India found a wide public in Brazil. Tagore seemed ideal to embody the hope of rebuilding the world on more spiritual and fraternal foundations. It was no wonder that Brazilians who were seeking a new road to self-expression in art and life, as represented for example by the *Festa* magazine group, were more genuinely interested in Tagore's inspiration rather than in questions of technical innovation (Meireles 1961).<sup>16</sup>

Tagore's appeal was also closely related to societal developments of socio-cultural significance. These encompassed a wide variety of issues, from

14 A fairly good account of the coverage on Tagore in *La Nación* is available in Dyson (1988) and a detailed treatment of the same is also included in an article by Paula Savon and Sonia Berjman (2014) in the encyclopaedic book on the international reception of Tagore edited by Martin Kämpchen, Imre Bangha and Uma Das Gupta.

15 In 1925 Vasconcelos writes about Tagore's presence in Latin America: "La América Latina, que hasta hoy solo podía contar con certeza con dos genios auténticos, la Ibarborou y la Mistral, se encuentra en estos instantes honrada por el genio de un apóstol que es probablemente la figura más grande del mundo contemporáneo. Rabindranath Tagore es grande porque es un prodigioso artista, un poeta a la hindú, para quien el verso es canción, y el ritmo del pensamiento es el mismo de la música" (Vasconcelos 1925: 4). ("Latin America, which until today could surely count on two authentic genius minds, Ibaraborou and Mistral, finds itself at this moment being honoured by the genius of an apostle who is probably the most important figure in today's world. Rabindranath Tagore is great because he is a prodigious artist, a poet in the Indian tradition, for whom verse is song and the rhythm of thought is the same as that of music." (My translation)).

16 The journal *Festa. Mensuário de arte e pensamento* was published between 1927 and 1929, and with the changed title *Festa. Revista de arte e pensamento* again from 1934-1935.

political reformism to identity issues. Within the latter, for example, the gender issue was gaining momentum and finding literary expression. The nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth in Latin America witnessed a progressive struggle for the rights of woman and her identity as an autonomous and independent self. Gabriela Mistral and Victoria Ocampo represented its concrete manifestations. In this scenario Tagore's forceful advocacy of freedom in childhood education and his emancipating stance in favor of women in the face of varied social and cultural injustices (in Bengal, which served as the microcosm of a very wide canvas) projected the idea of selfhood and individuality defined and uniquely constructed in a cultural context but also sharing universal constants with all other feminine selves. However, Tagore's use of language makes clear that he posited the understanding of this self-generating meaning and truth against the overall structure, and this juxtaposition altered the meaning of the self and affected its subject position. In this way he was a humanist, true, but he was suggesting something beyond the tenets of humanism of a unique self for all times. This (post-structuralist *avant la lettre*) awareness of the altered image of the self is further suggested and reiterated in the domain of his portrait paintings. Similar suggestions in the examination of the identity question can be readily found in many important Latin American writings. Therefore, although the Indian poet's humanist stance and universalist aesthetic expressions were transmitted through the transatlantic presences of personalities like Ortega y Gasset and Juan Ramón Jiménez in Latin America in different periods, writers and poets from the latter space found in the expressive strands of freedom and autonomy of Tagore's thought an independent source for empathy and dialogue with India.

In the realm of prose, Tagore's great experiment bridging the gap between prose and poetry created an immense interest in many writers. In one of his encounters with Juan Ramón Jiménez in 1937, José Lezama Lima raised this question with regard to *Platero y yo*, whose later stories show an intensification of poetic prose, something that carried the imprint of his Tagorean phase (see Chacón n.d.). In this conversation, later published as "Coloquio con Juan Ramón Jiménez", one finds the Spanish poet's peremptory prescription to go beyond the canonic classical meters with freedom and openness over and above a nationalistic "cosmic insularity" conceived by Lezama Lima for poetic creation. Much later, talking about the geographical similarities, and hence cultural affinities, together with the experiences of social syncretism in many parts

of India and Latin America, Octavio Paz felt convinced that Tagore's expression of the man-nature relationship would inevitably have an impact on Latin American writers (Chacón n.d). But beyond this there could be another affinity designed by the human forces on the two sides. Within the ambit of his thoughts on nationalism, universalism and Indian history, Tagore considered Indian social civilization as "founded on the adaptation of races to recognize the real differences between them and still find the basis for unity" (Das Gupta/Ray 2011: 46). This non-colonial historiography is not very different from the 'transculturation' hypothesis of contemporary Latin American culture, such as that conceived by critics such as Fernando Ortiz and Ángel Rama. Certainly in the Tagorean domain of Bengali culture and many parts of Latin America this affinity of experience contributed to the radical transformation of language use, invigorating and altering the classical forms with modes of colloquial speech and introducing an ironical vision of reality. In a recent study, I have been looking at this similarity between the narrative of the Peruvian writer Ricardo Palma and certain 19<sup>th</sup> century writers from Bengal promoted by Tagore.<sup>17</sup> Can this experience, being a further unexplored motive for Tagore's appeal, be a basis for strengthening the 'third space linkage' (in the sense of a complex geo-cultural relationship) that we are considering?

I am sure that such affinities added to the magical effect that Tagore's poetry had on so many poets and writers. Tagore himself felt that Latin America was a new continent while India was old (in an interview given to a Cuban journalist during his visit to U.S.)<sup>18</sup> and, in his view, there was probably a lot to learn from the melancholy of ages that produced Indian spiritualism. He was also convinced that the West too had a deep spiritualism movement in search of the truth, but it was his ability to humanize this spirituality, where love for God didn't exclude the love of the physical world, as well as his ability to combine the personal with the universal, that appealed to many writers. Eduardo González Lanuza, writing in the journal *Sur* in 1961, highlights this aspect of Tagore, taking examples from *Gitanjali* as the moving force of this thought process. He also identifies how the Tagorean literary creations serve the human need for communion (González Lanuza 1961). Ernesto Sábato, in response to Sartre's rejection of literature as treason so long as the problem of hunger prevailed, under-

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<sup>17</sup> See my prologue in Ray/Yrigoyen 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Argüello Scriba 2011: 123, note 1.

lined this objective of art as an instrument for salvaging the abyss between consciences, an abyss which has only deepened due to the alienation imposed on human beings by contemporary global structures (Sábato 1963).

This human condition is amply evident in all forms of serious contemporary Latin-American artistic expression, most certainly in the novel and in poetry. Whatever the form of modernity in which they are expressed, one can identify their cognitive and integrative functions besides the cathartic, either in their utterances or silences. And in this projection they have moved from the epistemological domain to the ontological one. In most of Tagore's works we experience the projection of the man-world relationship where the particular always leads to the universal. This comes through an engagement of the individual with the supra-individual. Taking a cue from what we said earlier about Tagore's radical advance beyond the established tenets of humanism, the universalism in Tagore's conceptualization goes a step beyond the universalism of humanist criticism so well-discussed in the textbooks on literary theory. Tagore's creative pursuit in making literature cognitive, transformative and integrative in its search for truth, taking the text out of its own confines, enriches the universalism of the humanist critical thought to which we are accustomed. The question of the universal has of course taken a different direction in the West ever since the advent of new approaches of critical thought, beginning with structuralism, with all their technical devices. The Latin American texts still manage to keep at bay the imposing demands of theory in preference to text. Humanist universalism continues to flow like a river with many turns. This is not the occasion to go into the reasons why. But in terms of literary production, we are witness to how – even in the post-structuralist and 'boomerang' phase – many of the exemplary representations of modernity cannot avoid a meta-narrative, in the sense of a universal destiny that reconciles the particular with the universal. I cannot avoid this reading whether it is Cortazar's *Rayuela* (1963) or for that matter Volpi's *En busca de Klingsor* (1999), two modern works from Latin-American literature that otherwise thrive on the elements derived from transatlantic transactions. The same level of reading provides me spontaneous entry, as a reader from another continent, into works such as *Cien años de soledad* (1967). Its universal dimension, revealed through the progressive intensification of individualism, in no way allows it to remain an Aracataca-centric narrative. Similarly Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* (1949) is a fertile terrain to connect with the myth, magic and history of the Latin-American or the

Caribbean context. As a comparatist I am drawn to the similarity of the apparently dissimilar when I read. Tagore's first important lyrical drama *Sanyaasi*, written in 1883, is considered by himself as an introduction to his whole future literary work, or as a subject on which all his writings have focused, which is the joy of attaining the infinite within the finite. Here Tagore expresses his philosophic vision through the dynamics of two protagonists, one a godly male and the other a commoner female, who symbolize the universal conflict of our human condition as individuals and our search for self-discovery and from there to the truth. This truth cannot be found in a vacuum but in the realm of this world, through pain and suffering, whatever our identity may be. Tagore thought of art as a "response of the creative soul to the call of the real", his 'real' always combining the transcendent and the immanent (Tagore 1931).<sup>19</sup> I see none of the Latin American literary creations, moving from historical reality to the different levels of reality of a totalizing novel with increasing doses of exegetic imagination, as different from the Tagorean proposition, which is to unravel the journey 'to the real' as he put it, although the allegoric form may be quite different.

To reiterate the question, do these common new humanist strands make a case for a closer look at a 'third space', whose comprehension may enrich the understanding of Latin American literature? Certainly this is a humanist space but, as we noted, this humanism is larger than the assumptions of the humanist criticism that dominated Anglo-American literary studies until the 1970s. It is fascinating how Tagore wanted to displace the centrality of the (fixed) self with a moving one, as determined by the dynamic and critical relation between the forces of particularity (the individual) and universality (the supra-individual), which necessarily implies a moving subject position. The constant dialogue between the individual identity and the supra-individual identity, which is central to his concept of universality, has a lot to do with the polarity of his personal experiences between binaries such as the inside and the outside, the free and the bound, the self and the other, etc.

The resulting subject is unidentifiable in its sharp contours, as can be seen in some of Tagore's paintings of hazy self-portraits or masks. Latin American literary output, in spite of its modernity and its projection of

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<sup>19</sup> This theme was part of his Hibbert Lectures delivered at Oxford in 1930 and later compiled in the form of a book *The Religion of Man* (1931).

the progressive intensification of individualism ever since the renaissance, seems to have preserved and even expanded the fundamental assumptions of humanist criticism. The texts do reveal universal truths about human nature and can speak to the inner truth of each of us while still approaching a universal constant. "I wake up/ This world/ is not a dream/ In the words of blood/ I saw my being/ through hurt and injuries/ Truth is hard/ It never deceives/ I loved that hardness [...]".<sup>20</sup> The knowledge of one's own being comes through the intervention of the other and through suffering. The inner self is explored not through the notion of outward social construction but through a journey within. Therefore the myriad emotions of his texts transcend the texts themselves and explore the highest human nature which lies in its "capacity of sacrifice and creative energy" which alone can make that deep discovery. Is it the same concept of human grandeur that Carpentier wants us to discover in the last pages of his *El reino de este mundo*? This discovery is also a constant preoccupation of many of the latest writings from Latin America based on the theme of plural identities and hybridity.

The assumptions of humanism as a critical framework, which we often ignore and which are significantly taken up in all Tagorean creations, probably have a larger role to play in establishing a dialogue with Latin-American literature than the exclusive concentration on transatlantic transactions for the latter's exegesis. Therefore, much more than being a purely two-way cultural history of exchange, "postcolonial representations" or an "Atlantic Dialogue", as for example Julio Ortega's Brown University Transatlantic Research Project – which seems to exemplify just such a theme of Latin American literature and culture (Ortega 2003) – the engagement with the Tagorean corpus could serve, as it did earlier, to enrich the fundamental humanist assumptions of a large body of writers more keen on inner truths and human values as desirable pillars of identity, with plurality, otherness, hybridity and universality as their priority concerns. Therefore, Tagore has the potentiality of serving as a third space in a triangular relationship reviving the universalist dimension of literature beyond the constraints of the East-West dichotomy. This is of great contemporary relevance.

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<sup>20</sup> Excerpt from the poem "Rupnaraner tire" written originally in Bengali on May 13, 1941, ten weeks before his death. This English version titled "On the banks of Rupnaran" and rendered by S. K. Das is reproduced from its citation in my article "The Lady of Letters, Ocampo, as Echo in Tagore" in Dey 1992.



This space has to integrate criticism of Tagore as well. As in India and Spain, the expression of conflictual dynamics must be allowed. However, critical reactions from such great poets as César Vallejo and Jorge Luis Borges, based on a limited reading of Tagore's output, represent more than anything else a hasty, epistemologically oriented or ideologically determined assessment of a poet who was quintessentially Indian without being dogmatic about North-South divisions. Borges found Tagore's mysticism vague and Vallejo thought of him as a champion of religious court poetry, even an agent in the service of British masters!<sup>21</sup> But as Borges was to admit later, he found in Tagore's concept of nationalism the grand concept of the defense of individual freedom against the state's oppressive control and a viable alternative for the generation of creative energy and change (Borges 1961). Tagore's own capacity to change and respond to modernity baffles us all. Cecília Meireles rightly summarized this relevance fifty years ago when she said that "the universality of Tagore's genius is reflected in everything that is studied and fostered as being most modern, and not only in Brazil but all over the world: the taste for folklore, the inclusion of Art in the technics of education, even the meaning of education as a group of disciplines and methods that leaves the realm of pure formality to become the process of human creation" (Meireles 1961: 337). The supremacy of the spirit over all else is what is discovered through a continuous process of critical analysis of his creations in all genres, and this very phenomenon of revival reveals many more creative interpretations of his genius, relevant for India and Latin-America.

It is significant that a world body such as UNESCO should have drawn up a very ambitious programme for implementation between 2011 and 2013, to project the idea of a reconciled universal in the crisis-affected world of today, refocusing on values, solidarity and humanism. The three major poets thus honored were Rabindranath Tagore, Pablo Neruda and Aimé Césaire, all seen to be reflecting at the highest level the interrelationship between the universal and the particular in understanding the com-

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21 Vallejo recognized Tagore's stature but made critical observations in some of his reports and features sent from Paris for Peruvian papers, later compiled in his *Crónicas Europeas* (Puccinelli 1987), while Borges in 1921 in the journal *Cosmópolis* published from Madrid was critical of what he thought was an excessive use of metaphors by Tagore, which he reiterated later in an interview to his diplomat and journalist friend Albino Gómez, maintaining his dislike for Tagore's "unctuous style" and the absence of "direct thinking" in reference to his metaphoric language. For Borges' further observations on Tagore and on British India, see Balderston 1993: 98-114, in particular 107, note 25.



plex process of modernity.<sup>22</sup> Beyond the confines of western Orientalism, the south-south connection and its cultural flows seem to be becoming a global imperative.

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22 See *Rabindranath Tagore, Pablo Neruda and Aimé Césaire for a Reconciled Universal*. <<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/tagore-neruda-and-cesaire/>> (15.03.2014).

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